

GUIDE TO TEACHER QUALITY

for
Local Education Leaders

The purpose of this guide is to assist local education leaders in the critical role of supporting student achievement. Our intent is to broaden local leaders' understanding of teacher quality and its connection to student achievement, and to suggest tools for local education leaders to use.

WHY IS TEACHER QUALITY IMPORTANT?

Our best chances for closing student achievement gaps lie with the teachers with whom our children are closely connected. Studies about the contribution of teachers to student learning show that “an effective teacher can be more important to student learning than a child's race, poverty level, parents' education, or any other external factor often thought to dominate school outcomes.”¹

Specific examples:

- Students with the most effective teachers for three years in a row outperformed students with the least effective teachers by 50 percentile points regardless of race, poverty or other external factors -*Tennessee (Sanders & Rivers, 1996)*.
- A high quality teacher throughout elementary school “can substantially offset or even eliminate the disadvantage of low socio-economic background” - *a study of student learning in mathematics in Texas (Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 1998)*.

Teacher quality has a direct and positive impact on student achievement. To close the achievement gap in Colorado and prepare **all** children with the 21st century skills required for economic success and civic involvement, we must ensure that **every** child is taught by a quality teacher.

WHAT DOES A QUALITY TEACHER LOOK LIKE?

There are many ways to describe a quality teacher, one of which is the Federal *highly qualified* requirements.

The Federal government, under the No Child Left Behind Act, requires that “all teachers of core academic subjects² in the classroom be highly qualified. This is determined by three essential criteria: (1) attaining a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; (2) obtaining full state teacher certification; and (3) demonstrating knowledge in the subjects taught.”³ From there, each state develops its own specific definition of highly qualified. In Colorado, to be highly qualified, teachers must (1) hold a bachelors degree, (2) obtain a state teaching license, and (3) demonstrate subject matter competency in all core academic areas in which they are assigned⁴.

¹Shining the Light: the State of Teaching in Colorado. Alliance for Quality Teaching, 2006.

²Core Academic Subjects: English, Math, Science, History, the Arts

³US Department of Education - <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/teachers/stateplanfacts.html>

⁴Colorado Department of Education: http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/NCLB/tiia_hqt.asp

Although these criteria are important, a quality teacher is not necessarily the same as a highly qualified teacher. Due to the differences in state definitions, for example, in establishing criteria for “full state certification,” the connections between “highly qualified” and “teacher quality” are not always clear and direct.

Although there is no single “definition” or description of a **quality** teacher, research confirms many characteristics that have a positive effect on student learning. The Alliance for Quality Teaching believes that, first and foremost, **quality teaching** is evidenced by producing high levels of student learning.

Among characteristics associated with teacher quality that have been studied by researchers:

- Intellectual ability (verbal ability, college entrance tests, college selectivity)
- Academic subject matter preparation
- Knowledge of how to teach (learning theory, instruction and assessment, classroom management)
- Teaching experience
- Race and ethnicity
- Cultural and multilingual competencies.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT TEACHER QUALITY

- **Experience is very important.** The ability of a new teacher to support student learning increases greatly during his/her first year of teaching and continues to grow through at least the first several years of teaching (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2004; Hanushek *et al.*, 1998).
- **Teacher attrition matters.** Districts and schools with relatively high rates of teacher attrition are likely to have more inexperienced teachers and, as a result, instructional quality and student learning suffer (Alliance for Quality Teaching, 2008).
- **Ability matters.** Teachers with higher scores on college admission or licensure tests as well as those from colleges with more selective admission practices are better able to support student learning (Gitomer, 2007; Rice, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Reichardt, 2001; Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996).
- **Teachers' subject matter knowledge helps students learn.** Students learn when their teacher knows the subject, particularly in secondary science and mathematics (Floden & Meniketti, 2006; Rice, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Reichardt, 2001).
- **Preparation and training in how to teach makes a difference.** Knowing how to teach improves student learning, particularly when a teacher is in his/her first years of teaching (Rice, 2003; Allen, 2003; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005).
- **Teacher diversity may also be important.** There is emerging evidence that students learn better from teachers of similar racial and ethnic background (Dee, 2004; Dee, 2001; Hanushek *et al.* 1998).